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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINS](#) [KU](#) [IZ](#) [IR](#)
SUBJECT: MUTHANNA GATHERING SHOWS POTENTIAL OF ORGANIZED
TRIBAL POLITICAL MOVEMENT

Classified By: PRT Team Leader Paul O'Friel for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)
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[11](#). (U) This is a PRT Muthanna reporting cable.

[12](#). (C/REL USA, MCFI) Summary: Over 900 sheikhs from tribes stretching from Wasit to Basra gathered July 16 in Muthanna under the auspices of two emerging political parties, the Assembly of the Middle Euphrates and the Sheikhs' Council of Southern Tribes. While voicing strong support for Prime Minister Maliki, particularly the operations he led against militias in Basrah and Amarah, they denounced the Council of Representatives and the religious parties for failing to meet the needs of the Iraqi people. The sheikhs agreed to draft a petition to the Prime Minister, President of the Council of Representatives, UNAMI SRSG, and U.S. Ambassador asking for their collective intervention with the Parliament to pass the Provincial Election Law quickly and set a date for elections.

With contacts already underway between the leaders of the Assembly and Sheikh Abu Risha of the Anbar Awakening, we may be seeing the beginnings of an organized tribally-based political movement. End summary.

GATHERING OF OVER 900 SHEIKHS

[13](#). (C/REL USA, MCFI) At the invitation of Provincial Council member Sheikh Hakim Khazal Khashan, PRT Team leader observed the July 16 gathering in Muthanna under the auspices of two emerging political parties, the Assembly of the Middle Euphrates and the Sheikhs' Council of Southern Tribes (Note: The Assembly of the Middle Euphrates registered for the upcoming provincial elections in Muthanna; the Sheikhs' Council registered in Dhi Qar. End Note.) Over 900 sheikhs from across southern Iraq attended the meeting, which was held at Sheikh Hakim's guest house. Joining representatives from nearly all the tribes of Muthanna were tribal leaders from Basra, Dhi Qar, Maysan, Wasit, Diwaniya, and Najaf.

[14](#). (C/REL USA, MCFI) The Muthanna gathering was the second meeting of the Tribal Assembly, which was first organized by Sheikh Ali Mohammed Munshid Habib in Nasiriyah, Dhi Qar province on July 1. Follow-up meetings in the next several weeks are planned in Diwaniya and Najaf.

PRAISE FOR MALIKI; CRITICISM OF PARLIAMENT

[15](#). (C/REL USA, MCFI) In a series of speeches led off by Munshid and Hakim, the sheikhs denounced corruption and inefficiency in Parliament and expressed frustration at being excluded from the political process. Their common theme was anger at the failure of Council of Representatives to address basic human needs. One sheikh declaimed, "First they took the fat, then they took the flesh, next was the bone, and finally the brain) now we have nothing left."

[16](#). (C/REL USA, MCFI) Prime Minister Maliki, however, was widely praised for his strong stand against the militias in Basra and Maysan. A Muthanna sheikh said he intended to

draft a petition to the Prime Minister asking him to engage in similar anti-corruption operations elsewhere in the south:

"He freed Basra and Amarah from the rule of thugs; we need him to come to our province and do the same thing." Maliki was also praised for his efforts to assist poor and underdeveloped areas. "He is trying to help us, but he is being undercut by the corrupt people around him."

DENUNCIATION OF RELIGIOUS PARTIES

17. (C/REL USA, MCFI) The religious parties came in for the sharpest and most virulent criticism. "These people came to power by using religious slogans to manipulate voters' minds; they have their own sectarian agenda and do not represent the people of Iraq or serve their needs," said one speaker. One Basra sheikh, in a whispered aside to Team Leader, commented "Everyone is afraid to say it, but there is an Iranian hand at work."

CALL FOR ELECTIONS AS SOON AS POSSIBLE

18. (C/REL USA, MCFI) Amid poetic recitations evoking the role of the tribes in Iraqi history and in the 1920 revolt, the gathered sheikhs expressed outrage at Parliament's dithering over the election law. "We want free and fair elections with open party lists as soon possible," demanded a sheikh. The sheikhs agreed to draft a petition to Prime Minister Maliki, the President of the Council of Representatives, the UNAMI SRSG, and the U.S. Ambassador asking their collective intervention to persuade the Council

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of Representatives to pass the legislation quickly and set a date for elections.

COMMENT

19. (C/REL USA, MCFI) The Tribal Assembly of the South is a trend to watch closely. The Muthanna gathering had all the signs of a developing political movement. The tribal dynamic is a powerful nationalistic force in Muthanna, and throughout the south. We understand, as well, that Sheikh Munshid has already established contact with Sheikh Ahmad Abu Risha of the Anbar Awakening, indicating an incipient effort to bridge the Sunni-Shia sectarian divide. The movement may also win outside support, as local sources tell us that Sheikh Hakim has traveled back and forth frequently to Kuwait to seek financing. End comment.

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